

## THE CONTEXT FOR THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

*“New Bedford is a living, active working community which has been preserved with pride. It is not a reconstructed town built to replicate the past. New Bedford’s buildings, commercial center, industries, waterfront, and streetscapes testify to a vigorous and exciting past.”*

Anne Brengle,  
testimony before Senate subcommittee

### A THUMBNAIL HISTORY OF NEW BEDFORD

The original people here, the Wampanoags, called this area “Acushnea” or “Cushnea.” This extensive tract of land lay within the boundaries of the Plymouth colony, yet it remained free of European settlement for nearly 50 years after the newcomers’ arrival. Purchased by members of the colony in 1652, the property was incorporated as the township of Old Dartmouth in 1664, encompassing the present Massachusetts towns of Dartmouth, Westport, New Bedford, Fairhaven, and Acushnet.

Following King Philip’s War (1675-1676) and the death of their leader, Metacomet (known to European settlers as King Philip), the Wampanoags dispersed. By 1690 Old Dartmouth’s population consisted largely of Quakers, who began to settle along the Acushnet River soon after the turn of the century.

At the middle of the 18th century, the township of Old Dartmouth remained an aggregate of small hamlets and scattered farmsteads. In 1755 the lands now occupied by New Bedford were still largely

forested, and the few farmhouses in the area stood some distance from the river.

Around 1760 Joseph Russell III, regarded as the city’s founder, drew up a plan for a village on the lower portion of his property near the western shore of the Acushnet River. Commercial and residential development followed, and by 1766 the land north of Union Street as far west as present Acushnet Avenue had been parceled and sold.

### New Bedford Finds Its Niche

The catalyst for the town’s development was whaling. Russell had begun whaling as early as 1755, but earlier English settlers had learned techniques of drift whaling from American Indians and had engaged in coastal whaling since the 1690s.

A Nantucket whaler’s accidental discovery of sperm whales in the early 1700s extended the range of whaling, and Nantucket emerged as the early leader in the industry. In May 1765 Joseph Rotch, a leading Nantucket whaling merchant, bought a large plot of land from Russell and began to transfer his family’s activities to Old Dartmouth.

Rotch and Russell took advantage of the deep harbor, an asset Nantucket lacked but which had become essential for the larger vessels that longer voyages and on-board processing demanded. Joseph Rotch provided the capital and expertise that led to the rapid development and remarkable success of the whaling industry and, consequently, the growth of the village. The northern half of the park constitutes the Rotch purchase.

Many artisans, tradespeople, and mariners followed Joseph Rotch, and Bedford village grew. Rotch launched the first locally built whaling vessel from

Fairhaven in 1767, introducing a fleet of larger vessels that ranged farther offshore for longer periods of time and launching a lucrative shipbuilding industry that complemented Bedford's whale fishery. By 1775 nearly 75 vessels and 1,000 seamen were employed in the town's burgeoning maritime industries. Two years later Bedford's whaling expeditions reached the West Indies, the Gulf of Mexico, and the northeastern coast of South America.

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, commercial and residential buildings were intermingled along Union Street. Whaling-related industries and commerce were located closer to the waterfront and along Water Street. From the outset of the war, Bedford village suffered enormous financial losses. Wartime conditions caused a steady decline in the village's maritime economy, and a British invasion in 1778 devastated both the village and the whaling industry. At the end of the war in 1783, Bedford village began to recover rapidly. In 1787 the town of New Bedford was established as an independent municipality.

On the eve of the war with England in 1812, New Bedford was a thriving maritime town. The Four Corners (Union and Water Streets) had become the commercial hub (and remained so throughout whaling's heyday). Many of the substantial residences and expansive gardens of New Bedford's leading merchant families stood within blocks of the waterfront, among shops and artisans' dwellings. In 1800 the three individuals believed to have net worth in excess of \$100,000—William Rotch, his son William, and son-in-law Samuel Rodman—resided in mansions that clearly proclaimed the social differentiation of New Bedford's political economy.

The War of 1812 effectively shut down the whale oil market. New Bedford's maritime industries idled, drying up most employment opportunities for the town's artisans and seafarers for the duration of the conflict. The declaration of peace in 1815 ushered in a period of unbridled growth, especially for the Rotches and others of New Bedford's whaling elite.

#### The Boom Years

*"They send you to New Bedford, that famous whaling port, And give you to some land-shark—to board and fit you out."*

Blow, Ye Winds in the Morning,  
American folksong

In 1823 New Bedford's whaling fleet equaled that of the town's closest competitor, Nantucket, in tonnage. At the close of the decade New Bedford had replaced Nantucket as the nation's preeminent whaling center, employing nearly 10,000 workers in an industry capitalized at more than \$12 million. New Bedford's fleet of 120 vessels was nearly twice the size of Nantucket's whaling flotilla, imported nearly 85,000 barrels of whale oil, and supported 10 local spermaceti factories.

Whaling by this time had become almost exclusively an American industry, largely through the efforts of New Bedford agents, particularly Joseph and William Rotch, Sr. New Bedford's whale products were in use up and down the Atlantic coast and were the chief source of illuminants in federal lighthouses. Such a flourishing business brought prosperity to the town. Its population increased

more than sevenfold between 1800 and 1830 and doubled again by 1845.

Every maritime industry connected with outfitting whaling ships was in full operation along the waterfront: shipyards, bakers, coopers, oil refineries, caulkers, ropewalks, carpenters, sailmakers, riggers, shipwrights, outfitters, marine insurance companies, and banks. It was around this time that Lewis Temple, an African-American blacksmith working in New Bedford, developed a harpoon with a toggling head that was less likely to be pulled out of the whale than other kinds of harpoons. This dramatically improved the success of the hunts.

New Bedford's enterprising Quakers, whose entrepreneurial spirit embraced the whaling industry, promoted the town's early development. As the prominent Quaker families' wealth swelled following the War of 1812, so did the rift between the merchant and working classes. This emerging hierarchy of wealth took geographic form in a new spatial configuration of class difference. During the 1820s a theological schism within the Society of Friends drove many of New Bedford's Quaker families into the Congregational and Unitarian churches, which allowed the luxurious lifestyles that the Friends' discipline had constrained.

In 1847 New Bedford's residents adopted a city charter. The new municipality's motto, *Lucem diffundo* ("We diffuse light"), symbolized the citizens' heady enthusiasm for building a prosperous and attractive city.

This prosperity was reflected in the city's new public buildings. Designed in Greek Revival style and constructed mostly of stone, these edifices were calculated expressions of austere monumentality

and permanence. Among the public and commercial buildings built during this period of civic improvement were a custom house, a courthouse, 10 schools, 20 oil and spermaceti processing plants, and four banks. The area now encompassed by the park became more business-oriented and less residential, but remained the core of the city's maritime-related activity during the peak of the whaling era.

### **The Economic Engine Sputters**

A financial panic in 1857 triggered an economic downturn, and the high prices of oil began to drop. In part, the very success of New Bedford's whaling enterprise carried the seeds of its demise. As whaling ships traveled longer distances and their quarry became increasingly rare, the price of whaling products rose, spurring a search for alternatives. The discovery of petroleum in Pennsylvania in 1859 signaled the beginning of the end. Kerosene quickly supplanted whale oil, further depressing the market for New Bedford's lifeblood product.

As the stock of commercially valuable whales declined, the pursuit of them extended farther and became more relentless. New Bedford had first penetrated the Pacific whaling grounds with the voyage of the *Rebecca* from 1791 to 1793. In 1848 a whaling captain passed through the Bering Strait. In the Arctic whalers discovered the bowhead, the last remaining viable population of commercial whales. Here the final stage of Yankee whaling was played out. As whalers pursued the bowheads deeper into the Arctic, the shortness of the ice-free season forced them to set up year-round bases on shore. Whalers adopted native methods but used them with modern technology, and their presence had an enormous

impact on the native population.

Bowheads were a source of whalebone, or baleen, and during the last three decades of the 19th century, this market kept New Bedford whalers afloat. Its strength and flexibility made baleen a valuable commodity for a variety of consumer products. Baleen prices continued to rise long after demand for the industry's other products had declined. Nonetheless, the development of alternative materials, coupled with changes in consumer tastes, caused the baleen market to collapse in the early 20th century.

Technological advances added to New Bedford's litany of troubles. The completion of a transcontinental railroad in 1869 expedited the distribution of whaling products, thereby making it possible for San Francisco to serve as a homeport and obviating the need for the Arctic fleet to return to New Bedford.

By 1874 most whaling vessels owned by New Bedford interests were based in San Francisco. This shift to the Pacific represented a tremendous loss to New Bedford's maritime support industries. Steam-powered vessels put competitive pressure on wind-driven whalers, and factory ships, which allowed crews to process whale products at sea, further reduced the fleet's dependence on its homeport.

While the number of New Bedford whaling vessels had begun to decline around 1860, a succession of fleet disasters over the next two decades dealt the industry a fatal blow. During the Civil War, Confederate privateers destroyed 28 New Bedford ships. Forty whaling ships were scuttled in Charleston and Savannah harbors in a failed Union attempt to blockade the ports. Another 32 ships were lost in 1871 when crews were forced to abandon the

icebound Arctic fleet. A similar disaster in 1876 claimed 13 more ships.

By 1897 New Bedford's whaling fleet had dwindled to 19 ships and barks, one brig, and 12 schooners. The industry's lingering denouement came to an end in 1924, when the *Wanderer*, the last whaling ship to be fitted out in New Bedford, sank off Cuttyhunk Island. Americans did not participate significantly in the industrial-style whaling that continues to this day.

### **From Whales to Bales**

Beginning with the opening of Wamsutta Mills in 1849, textile manufacturing gradually supplanted whaling as New Bedford's primary industry. In the last decade of the century, New Bedford ranked third in the number of spindles in cotton manufacturing in the United States, trailing only Fall River and Lowell, Massachusetts. Two massive mill districts, in the North End and the South End, framed the increasingly neglected waterfront district. During the textile era, Union Street and the Four Corners lost importance as commercial activity changed.

The industrialization of New Bedford drastically transformed the social fabric of the community. Between 1870 and 1880 the city's population increased by 26 percent, largely inflated by immigrants who came to work in textile mills. By 1920 the Portuguese had become New Bedford's largest ethnic group; large communities of French Canadians, Cape Verdeans, West Indians, Irish, and Poles were also here.

Some of those groups, especially the Cape Verdeans, West Indians, and Portuguese, had come to New Bedford to work in maritime trades. New

Bedford's harbor remained vital to the city's economic pulse, but bales of cotton had replaced the casks of whale oil that once crowded the wharves. The content and character of the town's commercial neighborhoods descended into neglect and were less oriented toward waterfront industry as the waterfront diminished in importance.

New Bedford whaling faded into a mythic memory. The prosperity of the city's textile industry during World War I spurred further development along the waterfront, notably the construction of State Pier in 1916. However, a precipitous decline of textile manufacturing in New England began in the mid-1920s, and many industrial buildings were abandoned.

Yet, the wharves had realized a new lease on life with the emergence of commercial fishing in 1909. By the 1960s a number of harbor improvements had made New Bedford a premier east coast fishing port.

#### **The Preservation Champion: WHALE**

Nonetheless, by the mid-20th century, the waterfront district's decline was unmistakable. In 1958 a feasibility study for neighborhood restoration, commissioned by the Old Dartmouth Historical Society's Museum Committee, laid the foundation for a community preservation effort. Four years later a number of committee members formed the Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE), a nonprofit organization dedicated to historic preservation and to restoring a working waterfront.

WHALE succeeded in diverting the new Route 18, thereby sparing several historic buildings. However, this success was a mixed blessing: the new highway separated the waterfront historic district

from the waterfront itself and destroyed much of the physical infrastructure associated with New Bedford's whaling legacy. Such devastating losses spurred WHALE toward a more aggressive program of acquisition, renovation, and resale of endangered buildings.

In response to the preservation community's appeals for support, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management in 1988 expressed its intention to add New Bedford to the Heritage State Park System. When an economic recession stalled this movement during the early 1990s, the Citizens Advisory Committee began to advocate establishment of a national park in New Bedford. This grass-roots effort led to a Special Resource Study, completed by the National Park Service in 1994, that validated the merits of this proposal and provided the basis for the park's enabling legislation two years later.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

This plan presents strategies for NPS involvement in resource protection and visitor services at New Bedford, defines NPS development proposals and associated costs, addresses carrying capacity, and verifies park boundaries. The planning process also identifies workable strategies to coordinate resource protection, exhibit development, and programming among park partners and assure a seamless visitor experience.

The plan prescribes an appropriate role for the NPS in New Bedford and suggests collaborative approaches that will ensure the long-term protection of the park's primary resources and delivery of high-quality visitor services. Further, it

makes clear the relationship between the park and the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska.

### PLANNING ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

New Bedford Whaling NHP's enabling legislation framed a non-traditional paradigm for its management: a national park unit in an urban setting, most of it in—and to remain in—private ownership, to be preserved, interpreted, and managed through a collaboration of the National Park Service with property owners, private institutions, and other government entities. Indeed, partnerships are a fundamental precept of this management model.

While the legislative language defines the parameters for park planning and management, the planning process had to address a multitude of issues related to resource protection, interpretation and visitor services, parking and access, and park operations and administration. Key issues that emerged during the planning process and are considered in the GMP/EIS include the need to:

- Develop a statement of the park's role and responsibilities in resource protection given the limits placed on federal ownership and authorities;
- Clearly define the relationship between the National Park Service and the New Bedford Historical Commission to help ensure that commission actions are congruent with the park's mission;
- Evaluate and address park partners' present and future needs for NPS technical and financial assistance;

- Address the stabilization and rehabilitation of the fire-damaged Corson Block Building located on a critical site within the park;
- Identify and implement opportunities to improve protection of and public access to historic collections in the park;
- Formulate an approach to coordinating visitor services among partners so that visitors enjoy a seamless experience;
- Identify and develop appropriate administrative, classroom, and flexible meeting spaces; and
- Define the relationship between New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park and the Iñupiat Heritage Center as directed by the park's enabling legislation.

The approved general management plan addresses these issues and analyzes the plan's potential impacts on park resources, services, and administration; on park partners; on adjacent properties; and, more broadly, on the city of New Bedford.

### Resource Protection

*"If you bulldoze your heritage, you become just anywhere."*

Sarah Delano, President of WHALE  
(1966-82), 1993

A distinguishing characteristic of New Bedford is its extensive and diverse historical assets. The components of this cultural heritage—historic landscape, structures, museum collections, ethnography, archeology—all contribute to the whole. Collectively,

the significance of these resources has led to the designation of a national historic landmark district, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, within the larger Waterfront Historic District, a local historic district authorized under Chapter 40C of the General Laws of Massachusetts. The 40C district and the park share a common boundary.

The enabling legislation specifies that one of the park's purposes is to help preserve and protect these resources except for the Ernestina. Moreover, a number of overarching laws, including the NPS's Organic Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, impose this mandate for resource stewardship.

Most proposals for alteration or redevelopment of properties within the historic district—and, concomitantly, the park—must be reviewed and approved by the New Bedford Historical Commission. Now seated on the commission, the NPS can help ensure that commission actions are congruent with the park's mission.

### *Historic Structures*

The NPS completed an inventory and condition assessment of 80 historic structures in 1998, and 40% were in fair to poor condition. Should they need stabilization or rehabilitation in the future, the NPS must be prepared to provide technical assistance and advice to the property owners.

Several structures within the historic district were specifically acknowledged in the national historic landmark district nomination as “mission-essential,” i.e., of particular importance in carrying out the park's mission. They include:

- The *United States Custom House*. Completed in 1836, this building symbolizes the economic importance

of New Bedford at its peak and whaling's contribution to government revenues. The Custom House, essentially intact in appearance, still serves its original function.

- The *Benjamin Rodman house*, built about 1825, exemplifies in its substantial but tastefully restrained architecture the wealth spawned by whaling.
- The *New Bedford Institution for Savings*, an 1850s brownstone that now serves as the park visitor center, conveys a sense of whaling's economic impact.
- *Seamen's Bethel*, an 1832 frame church featured in *Moby-Dick*, was rebuilt in 1867 after a fire. This structure, still used for worship, reminds us of the sea and its dangers and helps connect Americans with the lives of seamen and the early humanitarian effort to offer them solace.
- Adjacent to Seamen's Bethel, *Mariners' Home*, built in the late 1800s as William Rotch, Jr.'s residence, was moved from its original location to its present site in 1850. Since, and still, a safe lodging for visiting sailors, it represents the lives of ordinary seamen as well as the effort of the city's elite to keep the downtown area attractive and secure.
- The main building of the *Whaling Museum Complex* is significant for its architecture and its extensive collections.
- *Double Bank* (1831-1833), designed in the Greek Revival Ionic temple style, was built in halves under different contracts. Much of the building's original character is intact.



- Built between 1810 and 1820, *Rodman Candleworks* was the city's first candle factory. It remained in Rodman family ownership until 1890, exemplifying the diverse economic activity and employment that stemmed from whaling.
- The *Bourne Counting House* (1847-1848) was the office of Jonathon Bourne, the most important owner of whaling ships in his day and an early investor in textiles. Bourne's career symbolizes the transfer of wealth created by whaling to other endeavors.
- Built in 1934 as a WPA project, the *Wharfinger Building* now houses the city's Waterfront Visitor Center and Office of Tourism.
- The 112-foot fishing schooner *Ernestina*, built in 1894, is a national historic landmark, the oldest surviving vessel of its type in the United States. Though not a whaling vessel, the *Ernestina* embodies the several eras of New Bedford maritime history, including Arctic exploration and immigration.
- The *Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum*, built in 1834, is New Bedford's only remaining whaling-era estate. The house and formal gardens are the best surviving examples of the "brave houses and flowery gardens" described in *Moby-Dick*. It exemplifies New Bedford's whaling fortunes and a rich tradition in American horticulture.

Yet another contributing building in the historic district, the *Corson Block Building*, adjacent to the park's visitor center, was gutted by fire in 1997. Loss of this Victorian structure, constructed between 1875 and 1884, would tear the historic fabric within the district.

Two additional sites may be incorporated into the park and consequently were factored into the planning process. The *Baker/Robinson Whale Oil Refinery Building*, circa 1845, was part of a larger complex that refined whale oil and manufactured spermaceti candles. The *Nathan and Polly Johnson House*, built in the 1830s and now a national historic landmark, was the first New Bedford home of slavery escapee Frederick Douglass—and the only one of his three New Bedford residences still in existence.

### *Cultural Landscape*

A recently completed Cultural Landscape Report for the park concluded that the park "appears to have retained a moderate degree of integrity as a whaling landscape. In spite of many changes to the historic landscape during the course of two centuries of industrial development and neglect, portions of the [park] successfully convey a sense of past time and place. In particular, the waterfront area maintains its romantic connection to the 19th-century whaling industry."

The integrity of the landscape is integral to the character of the historic district. Although some key viewsheds remain, ornamental trees, fencing, and on-street parking have compromised the quality of critical views within the park. Similarly, Route 18, which segregates the waterfront from the historic district, degrades historic views and the overall sense of place. Efforts to redesign the highway are under way, and NPS participation in the design process is essential to assure that park values are protected.

The street pattern and the structures that line the streets principally define the spatial organization of the park. The smaller blocks in the center of the



park lend an intimate scale to the streetscape, but the scale is violated by the intrusion of large 20th-century buildings. Streets within the historic district were resurfaced in the 1970s using 19th-century paving patterns and materials that are now a contributing feature. They define the district's boundaries and identify it as a distinctive, integrated unit. Concrete has sometimes been used to repair these surfaces, but future repairs to original paving stones and bricks should use like paving materials and preserve the original fabric as fully as possible.

During the 19th-century whaling era the area of the historic district was primarily commercial and industrial in character. Few, if any, ornamental plantings or street furnishings were used. Consequently, planters, street lights, benches, and trees in the district must be sparingly used, judiciously placed, and compatible in style with the period setting.

Redevelopment of any of a number of vacant parcels within the district could adversely affect the historic landscape. NPS review and, potentially, some technical assistance in any redevelopment proposal would ensure consistency with the style, materials, massing, and other design elements of the historic district and mitigate the potential impacts.

Any proposed development on New Bedford's waterfront, most of it outside the park but integral to the cultural landscape of the city, is subject to local land-use regulations and state tidelands regulations under Chapter 91 of the Massachusetts General Laws. Those regulations define the constraints under which activities that may affect public rights in tidelands may occur. Moreover, the park's waterfront sites are within the designated port area

(DPA), established in Massachusetts in 1978 to preserve and promote maritime industries.

### *Museum Collections Management*

While the National Park Service has no significant collections, several New Bedford institutions hold outstanding park-related collections of artifacts, documents, and memorabilia. These institutions' capacity to manage their holdings varies. In some cases public access to collections is severely limited by the lack of finding aids, the fragile condition of materials, and staffing shortages.

The NPS does not yet have a climate-controlled exhibit space or trained specialists to handle and curate these collections, constraints that hobble the park's ability to produce temporary exhibits that incorporate these holdings. However, the park's enabling legislation commits the NPS to help preserve and interpret the collections managed by park partners.

Collections at some of the institutions are in jeopardy. Although the New Bedford Whaling Museum employs professional museum staff, most partners manage their collections using volunteer curators or employees who perform this function as a collateral duty. Storage conditions do not meet professional standards, public access to several collections is marginal, and conservation needs have not been assessed. No standardized record-keeping or accountability system exists. Yet, all of the partners are looking to the NPS to provide guidelines and treatment recommendations to correct deficiencies. A comprehensive assessment of collections

management is critically needed to develop a consistent approach among park partners and to facilitate access for research.

Notable collections include:

- The New Bedford Whaling Museum houses one of the world's largest and most diverse collections pertinent to whaling as well as an extensive local history collection. While 95% of the collection is accessioned and 70% is cataloged, only 20% has been inventoried. Finding aids for the archives would be beneficial.
- The New Bedford Free Public Library has been accumulating collections of archival materials and art since 1853, much of it directly relevant to whaling. A significant portion relates to New Bedford's population and civic history. Some of the most frequently used items in the collection should be copied to microfilm to protect them. An up-to-date assessment of preservation needs would also be helpful.
- The Seamen's Bethel needs a fire-suppression system to protect its significant historical records that date from around 1852.
- The files of the Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE), incorporated in 1962, extensively document its activities, notably its preservation campaign, and contain valuable research material for many historic buildings. These files must be properly surveyed, organized, and protected.
- The Schooner *Ernestina* Commission maintains administrative records and relevant historical collections that are not uniformly strong. Storage space is

inadequate in size and lacks climate controls. Records describing the provenance of the collections are also weak, and research space is insufficient.

- The Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum houses collections acquired principally through family connections. Many objects belong to personal collections of families who lived in the house, and many of the pieces displayed do not represent the actual period of occupancy.
- The New Bedford Historical Society, formed in 1996 to celebrate the history and legacy of people of color in New Bedford, holds no collections as an organization. However, the collections of individual members may be donated when the society is situated in permanent quarters. The society recently purchased the Nathan and Polly Johnson House.

#### **Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services**

*"One thing is sure, and must be underlined: that what one sees with the eyes is not enough for the attainment of understanding, either of the natural world or the social world of man. As Charles Darwin said, 'We must see with the eye of the mind.' Interpretation...promotes that mindsight."*

Freeman Tilden

The NPS and its partners collaborate in offering an array of interpretive and education programs and media germane to New Bedford's whaling history.

Intended as a catalyst in the chemistry between people and places, guided and self-guiding walking tours, teacher institutes, school field trips, exhibits, festivals, and lecture series are among many activities available to visitors and local citizens.

In a 1999 visitor survey 91% of participants rated the quality of visitor services at the park as “very good” or “good.” Noteworthy interpretive opportunities include:

#### *Visitor Centers*

The NPS operates the park’s visitor orientation center year-round, relying on a dedicated volunteer staff to provide most information services. These volunteers, numbering more than 70, also lead walking tours of the historic district, daily during summer and on weekends or by appointment the rest of the year.

The city’s Office of Tourism and Marketing operates the Waterfront Visitor Center, also year-round, and has operated two temporary visitor centers during two recent summers. This staff also hosts special-interest groups, bus tours, and walking tours throughout the year.

Both visitor centers provide brochures, maps, and other orientation materials; are equipped with audiovisual equipment; and offer interpretive sales publications.

#### *New Bedford Whaling Museum*

Centrally located in the park, this venue is the largest museum devoted to American whaling. Its galleries house both long-term exhibits and a yearly average of eight changing exhibitions. Special lectures and symposia are often scheduled to complement the

exhibits. Museum docents provide most of the interpretive services.

The museum hosts a variety of special programs throughout the year, both independently and collaboratively with other institutions. Festivals, professional conferences, and several lecture series celebrate and showcase the vibrant traditions and talents of an active maritime community.

The museum’s other interpretive media include its newsletter highlighting special events and collections, exhibit catalogues for special exhibits, a weekly local-access television program, and live demonstration projects.

#### *Seamen’s Bethel*

Operated by the Port Society, the historic Seamen’s Bethel is open to the public year-round. Historic tablets chronicle the sacrifices of local mariners, and volunteers staff the building to provide information. The community still uses the building as a venue for religious activities. The Mariners’ Home next door is still used as it has been since about 1851 as an overnight haven for fishermen and merchant mariners.

#### *Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum*

The East Coast’s only remaining in situ whaling mansion, the 22-room house and gardens are open to the public. The museum hosts house and garden tours, four special exhibits annually, and an assortment of special events, including fashion shows, poetry readings, holiday celebrations, concerts, and field trips to other institutions.

### *The Schooner Ernestina*

Operated, restored, and preserved by the Schooner Ernestina Commission, this historic sailing ship is the venue for programs that celebrate diversity, creativity, value, and dignity. The vessel hosts numerous dockside programs, and during the sailing season, groups venture out on one-day, overnight, and multi-day sails. Berthed at home or while visiting other ports, Ernestina participates in waterfront events in collaboration with local communities. An interpretive exhibit usually displayed in the staff offices accompanies the vessel as a traveling exhibit when it visits other ports.

### *Other Organizations*

A number of other local organizations offer interpretive activities, media, and special events, among them:

- The New Bedford Historical Society, dedicated to interpreting the history and contributions of people of color in New Bedford, sponsors or co-sponsors a number of special events, including theatrical performances, educational and social events, film festivals, exhibits, and symposia. It has produced a Black Heritage Trail self-guiding brochure and many articles.
- The New Bedford Preservation Society commemorates the city's architecture and gardens through a host of special events and activities. It also offers a brochure for a self-guiding walking tour and volunteer-led tours, sponsors a lecture series, plants specimen trees, and places plaques to identify the city's historic buildings.

- The Waterfront Area Historic League (WHALE) helps preserve the historic character of New Bedford through real-estate transactions, education, advocacy, and planning. WHALE presents a monthly local-access television program, has formed a teachers' focus group to plan educational projects and programs, participates in teacher in-service training and school field trips, and has sponsored historic preservation training for local realtors.

- The New Bedford Public Library provides class tours for students at all academic levels, workshops, public exhibits, and presentations on local history and genealogy.

- Special events and cultural activities occur in the park throughout the year, some co-sponsored by the NPS, such as the Maritime Heritage Festival and the Thursday Evenings in the Park Series. The New Bedford Chamber of Commerce is the primary sponsor of Summerfest, the city's Fourth of July celebration that brings 100,000 people to the park. The city of New Bedford also sponsors a number of art and cultural programs, some of them targeted for local students.

- Opened in 1999, the Iñupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska, interprets native Alaskan culture, its role in 19th-century whaling, and its connection to New Bedford. An exhibit developed by the NPS, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and the New Bedford Free Public Library is displayed at the center.

The number and diversity of exhibits, programs, and special events is impressive, but still lacking is a provocative overarching introduction to the park and to the options and opportunities available to visitors.

Exhibits and an audiovisual presentation that orient visitors to the park's mission and resources would make their experiences more meaningful.

Coordination of the NPS's and park partners' visitor and interpretive services, such as wayside exhibits, publications, information services, interpretive programs, and curriculum-based education, must also be developed to assure consistent and unified presentation of the park's themes and stories. Without it, visitors do not perceive the park as a cohesive whole or experience it seamlessly.

### *Education Programs*

New Bedford's institutions and organizations, individually and collaboratively, offer an array of curriculum-based education programs for school students and teachers, including teacher institutes and workshops. Programs enjoy grant support from the Massachusetts Department of Education and the Jessie B. DuPont Foundation and co-sponsorship by the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, the Lloyd Center for Environmental Studies, and the New Bedford public schools. Professional development and graduate credits through the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth have been available to participating teachers in one workshop.

Additional classroom and flexible meeting space is inadequate to meet current needs for these facilities. Those demands are likely to grow as park programs and outreach expand.

### **Other Park Operations and Administration**

As a new unit of the national park system, New Bedford Whaling NHP is still building its organization and its relationships. With a small staff, the NPS

relies extensively on park partners and volunteers to carry out its mandate to preserve, protect, and interpret the park's resources.

The NPS inherited two strong volunteer groups who merged when the park was established. This corps of more than 70 dedicated individuals annually donates more than 15,000 hours of volunteer service to the park, greeting visitors, providing directions, and leading walking tours.

Cooperative agreements formalize the NPS's relationships with park partners, stipulating the projects to be undertaken, how they will be funded, and applicable standards. Partners with a formal legislated connection or cooperative agreement with the park include:

- The City of New Bedford works with the park through many departments as well as educational projects in the public schools. The city operates the Waterfront Visitor Center, and the NPS sits on the New Bedford Historical Commission.
- The Waterfront Historic Area League (WHALE) donated the building that houses the park visitor center and supports research and programming through its cooperative agreement.
- The New Bedford Whaling Museum/Old Dartmouth Historical Society offers a steady year-round stream of quality programming and independently sponsors a number of special events. Museum officials have expressed serious interest in serving as the venue for an audiovisual program that would interpret the park's primary themes.

- The Inupiat Heritage Center in Barrow, Alaska, is linked to the park through its enabling legislation. The NPS works in partnership with the center to commemorate the 2,000 whaling voyages to the western Arctic and the contributions of Alaska natives to the enterprise.
- The Schooner Ernestina, owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, participates in many park-related programs.
- The Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum offers regularly scheduled tours and special events. Its themes emphasize domestic life, finance of the whaling industry, and gardening and horticulture. The NPS has provided some support to preserve the infrastructure of the mansion.
- The New Bedford Historical Society, which recently purchased the Nathan and Polly Johnson House, works with the NPS to research and interpret the contributions of people of color to New Bedford's history. It has co-sponsored scholarly research on maritime connections to the Underground Railroad and an oral-history project on whalers of color.
- The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), a federally recognized tribe of more than 800 members, has a historic interest in New England whaling. Active participants in the industry from the outset, the Wampanoag Tribal Historic Preservation Office now provides consultation to the NPS on archeological, ethnographic, and programming issues.

Missing from the partnership mix is a *friends group* that would be dedicated to advocacy and fundraising for resource protection and interpretive program

and media development. The NPS encourages the formation of a friends organization for New Bedford Whaling NHP.

The park's administrative offices, on the second floor of the Custom House, are leased through the General Services Administration. An additional office and small conference room are located in the old New Bedford Institution for Savings. These facilities allow little room for staff growth, and the Custom House is not wheelchair-accessible. As staffing increases, additional space will be needed for administrative and visitor-service functions.

***Fee Collection*** is not an issue for the NPS. While several park partners charge admission or program fees that are critical to their operating budgets, the NPS does not charge fees for special programs and uses or a park entrance fee. An entrance fee in this urban setting with multiple access points and limited federal ownership would be impractical.

***Maintenance*** of city areas, streets, and exterior features associated with the park is performed primarily by the city of New Bedford. Maintenance of the Custom House and janitorial services for NPS facilities are contracted.

The city's police and fire departments provide *public safety services* within the park.

#### ***Parking, Circulation, and Access***

Highway access to New Bedford and to the park is direct, convenient, and well-signed. Trailblazer signs directing drivers to the park are also located at key points in the city and throughout the historic district, helping lead visitors to parking, the visitor orientation center, and attractions such as the

whaling museum. Some signs directing visitors to parking lots and garages are confusing, not distinguishing clearly between long-term and short-term parking.

Perhaps the most significant park access issue is Route 18, a six-lane limited-access highway that separates the city—and the park—from the waterfront. While vehicles moving between the park's core and the waterfront can safely cross this artery on Union Street at a light-controlled intersection, limited public parking on the waterfront leaves visitors little choice but to park downtown and walk to the waterfront. Yet, pedestrian access from the historic district to the waterfront is problematic. The traffic signals at Union Street are poorly timed, and pedestrians must be negotiate the crossing quickly. A wheelchair-accessible pedestrian overpass at Rodman Street is available, but is often debris-strewn and marred with graffiti.

A project to redesign Route 18 is currently under way. The NPS will need to evaluate proposed changes but, lacking local staff expertise, will seek assistance from the Boston Support Office to respond effectively.

Otherwise, New Bedford is a walker's city. The street scale, architectural composition, and close proximity of key sites make walking a pleasurable experience. A number of maps, self-guiding brochures, and guided walking tours make navigating the city easier. However, physical markers and signs targeted for pedestrians are limited and should be augmented to guide visitors more clearly. Especially needed are marked routes to direct visitors from the core of the park to the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum.

### *Parking*

Two off-street parking facilities within the park, the Elm Street garage and the Custom House Square lot, provide a total of 1,085 spaces. Street parking in the historic district contributes additional parking capacity of 188, but only 164 spaces are available for two hours or longer. Based on a 1998 parking study and visitation projections developed for this plan, the NPS believes the existing capacities of the garage and lot are adequate to satisfy the average peak demand for visitor parking, although the pricing structure for the Custom House Square lot is not attractive for long-term parking.

In contrast, parking for the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum is limited mostly to County Street and nearby residential side streets. For after-hours special events, adjacent businesses permit use of their lots. During the peak visitation season, the "Catch the Whale" shuttle, a free city transportation service that links the Elm Street garage with a number of key city sites, mitigates this parking shortage.

Parking for tour and school buses, now confined to two spaces, and the impacts of their circulation within the historic district are issues that must be addressed in future planning. A number of off-site locations for bus parking have been considered, but no suitable site has yet been identified.

### *Wheelchair Accessibility*

Of six park-related structures now open to the public, four are wheelchair-accessible. Only the schooner Ernestina and the Seamen's Bethel are not. Wheelchair accessibility on the park's streets and sidewalks is inconsistent, particularly on side streets



where sidewalks are narrower and crosswalks and curb cuts are harder to find. Most of the sidewalks between the historic district and the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum have appropriate street crosswalks and curb cuts.

Only three street parking spaces designated for disabled visitors are available. Additional spaces are needed.

#### **Relationship of the GMP with Other Plans and Projects**

Several large-scale projects are proposed for areas adjacent to, within, or encompassing the park. These planning initiatives, by the city and private entities, could affect park programming and administration and, consequently, some of the provisions of this management plan.

##### ***New Bedford Oceanarium***

This proposal would adaptively reuse a former Commonwealth Electric generator plant on the waterfront, located just southeast of the park boundary. Community-based, the oceanarium would be dedicated to environmental sustainability, educational enrichment, and economic revitalization. It would create partnering opportunities that would celebrate New Bedford's rich maritime heritage. It could attract more than 3.6 million visitors annually.

##### ***New Bedford/Fairhaven Harbor Master Plan***

This plan defines the communities' vision for the harbor's future and embraces areas, cited in the park's enabling legislation, that have important cultural resource and visitor-use values. It proposes a

number of initiatives, to be implemented over a period of five to ten years, that would complement the park's mission.

The master plan would repair public piers and wharves on the central waterfront and revitalize State Pier as an active multiuse terminal. It would develop an interpretive center for the schooner Ernestina and a floating dock for commercial excursion and charter fishing vessels on the southwest corner of State Pier. The master plan would launch cross-harbor water-taxi service between New Bedford and Fairhaven. It would enhance pedestrian and bicycle access to the waterfront, including the redesign of Route 18, and undertake a waterfront public access and open space study.

##### ***Router8/JFK Highway Access Improvement Project***

The city of New Bedford, in concert with the Massachusetts Highway Department, has awarded a contract to redesign this highway with the objective of resolving vehicle and pedestrian waterfront-access issues. This route must serve diverse users, from pedestrians at one extreme to semis at the other. Proposed developments along this corridor will substantially increase vehicular and/or pedestrian traffic, and the city envisions a number of potential features that could significantly improve safety for both.

##### ***New Bedford Whaling Museum Expansion***

A major visitor destination on a prominent site in the park, the museum recently completed a \$10 million fundraising campaign to restore and expand its facility in time for its centennial celebration in 2003.

The museum has also developed a new, expanded entrance and additional exhibit space.

*Commuter Rail Service Expansion*

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is developing plans to restore commuter rail service between New Bedford and Boston. At least one station would be located downtown. Implementation of this service would likely occur during the life of this management plan.

*City of New Bedford Master Plan*

The city began work in 1999 on a plan that will supersede the plan completed in 1963. The city's central business district and the park are expected to be the focus of the new plan.

*Downtown New Bedford Commercial Area  
Revitalization District Plan (CARD)*

The state approved in 1999 a CARD plan submitted by the city. With the exception of the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, the area defined in the CARD plan encompasses the park. The plan proposes revitalization actions that encourage investment and redevelopment downtown, approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as an Economic Opportunity Area.